



County to consider Nature Center along Clinton River

By Heidi Roman
C & G Staff Writer

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — A 33-acre area of unspoiled nature and wildlife refuge owned by Macomb County could be preserved under a new proposal. The county is exploring the idea of building a nature center with an outdoor classroom to educate local children.

Gerard Santoro, a senior planner with the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development, said the site is located along the North Branch of the Clinton River near Dunham Road, behind the county's Public Works office.

Santoro said the county has already identified the site as one of its most precious natural areas south of Hall Road because of the untouched wooded area and its location along the river.

"There is a lot of natural flora and fauna," he said.

Deputy Public Works Commissioner Gene Schabath said the proposed center offers a great opportunity for residents in the county to better enjoy the land.

"It looks like you're up north," he said. "We have lots of wildlife ... which can't be found any place else in southern Macomb."

Schabath said the land is home to deer, fox, blue heron and raccoons.

The new nature center could include an outdoor classroom, two bridges, restrooms and signage. An existing trail would be enhanced.

"During good weather, we'll have a short dock that goes into the North Branch (of the Clinton River)," Santoro said. "Kids can come learn about water sampling."

There could also be an amphitheatre to seat 20-30 children during nature lessons.

Detroit businessman and regional philanthropist James B. Nicholson and his wife offered to contribute \$150,000 to the project, and the nature center would be named after them. Nicholson grew up on a farm on Little Road in Clinton Township, near Dunham Road, Santoro said, and has a passion for preservation. Nicholson also owns land near the proposed site.

No additional money would be needed right away, but Santoro said the county is exploring other options for a conservation easement in the future.

The full Board of Commissioners is expected to take a formal vote on the proposal on

Dec. 11. If it were approved, work on the center would likely begin in the spring.

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